DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 050 040 SP 004 914

AUTHOR Feper, John E.
TITLE A Systematic Change Model for Improving Urban Teaching.
PUB DATE 71
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at AERA annual meeting, New York, 1971

EDRS PRICE EDRS Price MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Teachers, College School Cooperation, *Inservice Teacher Education, *Language Instruction, *Reading Improvement, School Community Cooperation, Summer Schools, *Urban Schools
IDENTIFIERS Portal School Program, Project for Improving Reading Language Teaching, *Project PIRLT

ABSTRACT

This paper reports an attempt to respond to the problems faced by new teachers in urban schools. Project PIRLT (Project for Improving Reading-Language Teaching) was initiated by the School District of Philadelphia and Temple University and sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English and the U. S. Office of Education. The Office of Research and Evaluation of the School District was invited to participate in the proposal development and to take full responsibility for the research and evaluation. The project was funded in May 1970 for one year to provide summer school training for 40 elementary teachers from two schools, followed by academic course work at Temple University, to conduct inservice training, to train special substitute teachers, to train and employ parents, to teach pupils by the methods employed in the program, to establish and staff reading demonstration teaching centers in the schools, to provide feedback to the teachers on their pupils' progress, and to explore methods of cooperation among university, school district, and community personnel. This project, which was coordinated with Temple University's Portal School project, has also resulted in a much broader testing program, providing immediate results for diagnostic and prescriptive purposes. (MBM)

ED050040

A SYSTEMIC CHANGE MODEL FOR IMPROVING URBAN TEACHING

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

John B. Peper

Executive Director
Office of Research and Evaluation
The School District of Philadelphia

A Paper Prepared for
American Educational Research Association
New York
February 1971

SP004914

Introduction

Just one year ago this month Peter Buttenweiser (1970) reported the results of a six months' analysis of teaching deficiencies in The School District of Philadelphia. Although Buttenweiser's report left much to be desired to an empiricist, the stinging truth quickens the senses to a serious problem that seems to be far too common for comfort in all of urban education, namely, the stark inadequateness of urban schools to introduce their new teachers to teaching.

Permit me to share three of Buttenweiser's paragraphs with you.

"On every level and in every dimension The School District is unprepared to handle the annual influx of 1500-2000 new teachers. Our selection procedures are undiscerning--that is they cannot even approximately predict who will perform successfully as a teacher and who will not; our schools have neither the working priorities, the time, nor the resources to successfully incorporate newcomers; communities have yet to feel sufficiently identified with their schools to provide essential support; and the overwhelming majority of new teachers enter the classroom with deficits in their background critical to the process of instructing urban youngsters.

"This lack of preparation results in tension, exhaustion, anguish, frustration, dejectedness and self-doubt amongst most new teachers. For their students it means an opportunity to encounter many fine, stimulating, warm people who simply find it difficult, if not impossible, to succeed in the school setting, thereby causing increased instability in an already rocky situation.

"Three points should emerge from this report: First, the school system, as presently constituted, is woefully ill-equipped to handle new teachers whose induction and performance represents an undeniable problem of great magnitude.

Second, we should regard this problem, with sadness, not anger; concern, not indignation; compassion, not irateness. Because there are no villains, recalcitrants or obstructionists in this story. The situation exists through the fault of no particular individual, group or institution. It results from the staggering number of people processed by the system and the vast complexity of the urban scene they encounter. Third--and vitally important--there is hope; there <u>are</u> things we can do to alleviate, if not solve, the new teacher problem."

<u>Project PIRLT</u>

This paper is a report of one attempt to respond to the problems that Buttenweiser explicated so colorfully.

To understand public school teaching in Philadelphia and the orientation problems inherent in initiating the neophytes requires a brief review of the major (1) sources of teachers entering The School District, (2) their assignment patterns and (3) the process for orienting the new teachers to their teaching assignments.

Our analysis revealed that two universities in the city, Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania, provided almost seventy percent of new teachers. Moreover, over eighty-six percent of all the teachers in our system hold one or more degrees from one of these institutions. Temple University alone had been the gate through which greater than sixty percent of the staff had entered the system or through which they had achieved graduate education. Clearly if we were to improve the experiences of new teachers, one route had to be through the local universities.

Fortuitously, as we began to conduct our analysis of the problem and to consider alternative solutions, the universities themselves had initiated several reform programs. Dr. Neal Gross began a program of leadership training at the

University of Pennsylvania which was specifically designed to educate prospective urban principals.

Temple University was involved in the Training Teachers of Teachers program. Their staff were also among the first in the city to contact us about a fascinating concept that Buttenweiser referred to as the Portal School.

Briefly, the Portal School is a school specifically designated to serve as an entry experience for new teachers in the system. From the outset we recognized that any school which would serve as a Portal School must wed the excitement of creativity and humility from the crucible of experience.

Two schools near Temple University were chosen as prototypes for the initial projects. The schools, Carver and Reynolds, are elementary schools in economically depressed neighborhoods. Their average pupil perennially scores two or more years below the national mean on standardized achievement tests. High teacher turnover was a further source of low morale.

Although this paper focuses attention on one project, and one university and two schools, there are several other models operating similarly throughout the city.

Parents of the pupils have been paradoxically supportive and critical of the schools. More often parents express frustration in attempting to cope with a system that is sometimes vague and too often perceived as hostile.

Low reading achievement is high among the long list of shortcomings in urban elementary school pupils. Improvement of reading teaching was one of the highest priorities given the Portal Schools.

Given the problems as outlined above, an inter-institutional team headed

by Marjorie Farmer, Director of Language Arts of The School District of Philadelphia, and Howard Blake, a professor in the College of Education at Temple University, proposed a project to the Commissioner of Education under the Education Professions Development Act. The project title, Project for Improving Reading-Language Teaching or PIRLT by acronym, was jointly sponsored by the National Council of Teachers of English.

There are some rather common sense components of this project, and I believe there are some unique ideas that are worth reporting to this group. Inter-institutional cooperation has long been postulated as a potential force for change, but repeated efforts to attempt such projects in the past, even among two institutions, have been at best difficult and in many cases frustratingly chaotic.

While there have been some trying moments, I can document that this project is an operating example of a cooperative effort among four major institutions, The School District of Philadelphia, Temple University, National Council of Teachers of English and the United States Office of Education.

Part of what I would like to report is the interlocking involvement of the four institutions and how that involvement is beginning to bring about systemic change within and between the cooperating institutions. Rather than make such a separate presentation at the systemic interaction, those components will be woven into the fabric of the project description which follows.

During the proposal development cycle in the spring of 1971, the project leaders asked the Office of Research and Evaluation of The School District of Philadelphia to participate in the proposal development and to take full responsibility for the project research and evaluation. I do not know if this is the first time that a school district research staff has been so acknowledged,

but I can report that it is an extremely uncommon trend.

PIRLT was funded in May of 1970 for one year to accomplish the following general objectives:

1. To provide summer school training for 40 teachers from two elementary schools of The School District of Philadelphia by Temple University Staff.

2. To provide academic year course work for the teachers at Temple University.

3. To conduct in-service training and supervision of project teachers at the two schools by a combined university and school district staff.

4. To train and to employ special substitute teachers.

5. To train and to employ parents to supplement pupils' classwork.

6. To teach pupils in the two schools using methods and techniques taught by the staff.

7. To establish and to staff reading demonstration teaching centers in each of the elementary schools.

8. To provide teachers diagnostic and summary feedback on their pupils' progress.

9. To explore multiple avenues of cooperation among university, school district and community personnel.

The summer school component proved to be the first of many tests of the cooperative potential of this project. Although forty teachers were identified to participate, the project starting date overlapped with the last week of school. The school principals responded by freeing as many teachers as possible for all but the closing day of school. Naturally every teacher wanted to spend the closing day of school with their children. Temple responded by holding their normal session after school closed on the final day.

A teacher strike at the beginning of school created an abrasive air

between some of the striking teachers and some of the project teachers who crossed picket lines. The efforts of both Temple University staff and local school leaders helped resolve the difficulties before they became counter-productive.

To train teachers in the school setting is a high priority of the project. Members of the project staff developed a multi-dimensional approach to in-school teacher training. They visit in the teachers' classrooms to demonstrate teaching techniques, to record pupil-teacher interactions and to serve as additional resource adults in the classroom.

Teachers are released from classroom duties once per week to attend a seminar in their schools. This seminar is organized and led by the Temple University staff. To insure that pupils do not forfeit the benefit of learning in the absence of their regular teachers, a special pool of substitute teachers was selected and specifically trained to instruct the pupils following the assignments of the regular teachers.

While learning to teach reading is the major activity of the teachers, they decided to administer and to score all of the tests used for evaluation. As a result, the testing program has been much broader than it would have been possible without their help. The teachers have also benefitted by having the test results immediately available to them for diagnostic and prescriptive purposes. Their role has also been expanded, redefined through their involvement in pupil testing and in keeping a personal log of daily anecdotes. The approach is similar to that of an anthropological researcher's paradigm of the participant observer.

Four other models are funded through NCTE with similar goals. Those projects are located at the Ohio State University, Chapel Hill, North

Carolina, the University of California at Berkeley and in Portland, Oregon.

The Learning Institute of North Carolina LINC was contracted by USOE to conduct an overall evaluation. Four meetings have been scheduled throughout the project year at different regional sites to report progress, to share experiences and to improve the project effectiveness.

Each regional meeting was provided new linkages among all of the project leaders, USOE staff, LINC staff and NCTEA executive leadership. One direct outcome has been the development of a bank of resources shared among the five regions of the country. This effort alone has proved to be a powerful and rapid means for disseminating collective experience during the active life of each of the projects.

The Model

Papers dealing with models often begin with a conceptualization of the model. Prediction models imply mathematical equations. Planning models imply drawings, graphs or iconic representations of the concepts under discussion. Since the model proposed here is organic, the discussion has proceeded developmentally from the nucleus of a seminal idea through development into a living system. This paper was, therefore, devoted to an explication of human change within and among cooperating institutions. The most appropriate analogue seems to be organic in that human change tends to be inappropriately represented by equations, or graphs or charts or even by icons. Human action, thought and emotion seem to require a model which seeks isomorphism with uncertainty in much the same way that Herbert Spencer mapped an organic explanation of evolution. More recently Jones (1963) described the organic model as movement from non-differentiation to differentiation. Throughout the developmental process patterns of movement are often ambiguous and almost always pliable. Only after functional

relationships develop between differentiated parts does the system emerge.

In our case the development of the Portal School concept has reached a stage of development in PIRLT that justifies its identification as a system. The model may now be represented verbally in two dimensions. One is the ontology which is the stuff of this paper. The second model will contain further differentiation as it relates with inputs and outputs. That model will be reported in the evaluation report in August of 1971.

Bibliography

Buttenweiser, Peter, "A Program to Improve the Performance of New Teachers in the Philadelphia School System" The School District of Philadelphia, 1970.

Jones, Ronald G., "Towards the Integration of the Foundations of Education," Educational Theory, Xiii, No. 2, (April 1963) 83.

Farmer, Marjorie and Howard Blake, PIRLT, A Proposal Submitted to the U. S. Commissioner of Education for Support through the EPDA Basic Studies Program." The School District of Philadelphia and Temple University, 1970.

Peper, John B., Thomas Clark and Marcienne Mattleman, "PIRLT, Project for Improving Language Teaching: Evaluation Plan," The School District of Philadelphia and Temple University, 1970.